

The Regional Municipality of York

Regional Council
June 25, 2020

Report of the Commissioner of Transportation Services

York Region Transit Protection of Transit Riders and Staff During the COVID-19 Pandemic

1. Recommendations

1. Council endorse the purchase of 100,000 non-medical, individually wrapped, disposable face masks at a cost of \$59,000, excluding HST, to be distributed to customers not having their own mask when entering the York Region Transit system; July 2, 2020.
2. Council approve Transit Bylaw amendments to include a mandatory requirement for individuals to wear a non-medical face mask or covering while on transit vehicles or property, effective July 2, 2020.

2. Summary

On June 11, 2020, Council directed staff to effect mandatory, non-medical face masks or coverings on all York Region Transit (YRT) buses and vehicles. This mandatory requirement begins on July 2, 2020, and aligns with actions planned by other Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) transit agencies. To promote this new requirement, staff is seeking Council endorsement to purchase 100,000 non-medical, individually wrapped, disposable face masks to distribute to travellers, at a cost of \$59,000, excluding taxes.

Staff is also seeking approval of Transit Bylaw amendments to include a requirement for individuals to wear a non-medical face mask or covering while on transit vehicles or property.

Key Points:

- YRT has implemented numerous health and safety measures to keep travellers, staff and contractor employees safe during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Starting July 2, 2020, YRT will require travellers to resume front-door boarding of buses and to wear non-medical face masks or coverings while on the system, as York Region is unable to guarantee physical distancing of two metres as ridership increases

- Traveller education on the need for face masks or coverings will continue to be provided through various communications
- An amendment to the Transit Bylaw will formally enact the requirement for mandatory non-medical face masks or coverings

3. Background

Health and safety of YRT travellers, staff and contractor employees continues to be a principal focus for York Region

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Regional staff has worked closely with the operation and maintenance contractors to provide public transit services deemed essential by the provincial government.

Regional staff has followed recommended guidelines provided by the provincial government (Attachments 1 and 2) and worked with organizations such as the Canadian Urban Transit Association and the Ontario Public Transit Association to ensure YRT's actions in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic reflect public health's direction and transit industry best practices.

Since the beginning of March, numerous health and safety measures have been put in place to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 while helping keep travellers, staff and contractor employees as safe as possible, including:

- Enhancing cleaning and disinfection of buses/vehicles and facilities
- Equipping on-street staff and bus drivers with personal protective equipment including hand sanitizer and disinfecting wipes
- Instructing travellers to board and exit buses through the rear-doors
- Reducing the number of seats available on all vehicles to provide physical distancing
- Creating a two-metre physical space around the bus driver
- Screening all travellers using Mobility On-Request and require them to wear a non-medical face mask or coverings

All recommended public health safety measures continue to be communicated to transit travellers through posters and notices directly at bus stops and terminals and through on-bus and terminal announcements. Information is also available on both york.ca and yrt.ca through dedicated COVID-19 sections and on transit-specific social media channels.

At the June 11, 2020, Committee of the Whole recommended that York Region introduce measures to make face coverings mandatory on YRT, effective July 2, 2020, and staff report back to the June 25, 2020 Regional Council meeting with an implementation plan.

4. Analysis

As the Province of Ontario reopens the economy, transit ridership in the Region is increasing

Transit, deemed an essential service by the Province, has continued to operate throughout the pandemic. Twelve weeks ago, consistent with other transit agencies across the country, YRT saw ridership decline by approximately 80%. The majority of travellers needed the service for necessary trips such as commuting to essential work, getting groceries and pharmaceuticals or going for medical care.

Physical distancing was possible while ridership was at its lowest levels from the end of March to May; however, this is no longer the case.

YRT's ridership has increased by 12% during the month of June. Conventional and Viva transit services are now being used by approximately 11,000 travellers each day.

YRT will resume front-door boarding on July 2, 2020, with additional health and safety measures, including the mandatory wearing of a non-medical face mask or covering

Most transit agencies in the GTHA will resume front-door boarding on July 2, 2020. Health and safety controls already in place will continue with a few additions, such as bus driver barrier shields, hand sanitizer dispensers, contactless fare payment options and mandatory non-medical face mask or covering requirements:

- Barrier shields are now being installed at the bus driver cabs; these will provide additional physical separation for bus drivers and thus facilitate the resumption of front-door boarding and safe use of the space at the front of the buses.
- Establishing one-way flow of travellers boarding and deboarding buses.
- Hand sanitizer dispensers are being installed at all YRT terminals.
- Travellers are being encouraged to use PRESTO or the YRT Pay app. Travellers can purchase or load a PRESTO card online or at any Shoppers Drug Mart across the GTHA. The YRT Pay app is available for free in the App Store or Google Play. Exact cash fares will still be accepted and paper transfers will be issued through contactless methods.
- Wearing of non-medical face masks or coverings on all YRT services will be mandatory and travellers will be expected to supply and wear their own that comply with public health recommendations. YRT will have a limited number of non-medical masks available for travellers who do not have their own when entering the system and these will be distributed by transportation services staff at various locations throughout the YRT system.

It is recommended the Transit Bylaw be amended to reflect the requirement for non-medical face masks or coverings

The Region's Transit Bylaw was enacted in 2017 and includes provisions governing the conduct of individuals while travelling on the transit system or on transit property, including bus shelters and terminals. These provisions are aimed at ensuring the safety and comfort of all transit users and include regulation of items that may be brought on transit vehicles and general guidance as to acceptable social behaviour.

It is recommended the Transit Bylaw be amended to include a provision requiring all individuals to wear a non-medical face mask or covering while on a transit vehicle and that this requirement is extended to all transit properties. Exemptions would be made for:

- Children under two years of age
- Those compromised by wearing a non-medical face mask or covering because of a medical condition
- Those unable to place or remove a non-medical face mask or covering without assistance
- Anyone who requires accommodation under the Human Rights Code

The Bylaw will also provide that these restrictions may be lifted at such time the Region's Medical Officer of Health determines they are no longer required.

Including these provisions in the Transit Bylaw would mean that penalty provisions could be invoked for any contravention. However, it is recommended that compliance be encouraged through education and public awareness. This is consistent with the approach in other jurisdictions. The enforcement tools may serve as an additional deterrent and would be available if deemed necessary.

YRT continues to employ a variety of strategies to communicate the need for non-medical face masks or coverings and other public health recommendations

YRT has been using a variety of communication tools to educate travellers on the protective measures, including creating information for targeted media and news stories, having staff on street to supply travellers with non-medical masks and to answer any questions, through on-bus information and posters directly at bus stops and terminals, and through on-bus and terminal announcements.

Information about the mandatory requirement will be available on york.ca and yrt.ca through dedicated COVID-19 sections and on transit-specific social media channels. In addition, all information is available in multiple languages using Google Translate on yrt.ca and through the YRT Contact Centre Language Line.

YRT staff will also consult with Community and Health Services to identify groups or residents who travel on YRT services and do not have access to a supply of masks.

5. Financial

The one-time cost to purchase 100,000 masks for the distribution to travellers who are in need of one is estimated at \$59,000, excluding HST.

Ongoing costs associated with YRT's health and safety measures are being tracked and reported to Council on a monthly basis through Corporate Finance.

6. Local Impact

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, travellers in York Region have had access to YRT services to connect them to their essential work, grocery stores, pharmacies and medical care. Health and safety initiatives have been implemented to reduce the risk of travellers contracting the virus. This will be further emphasized with the mandatory requirement of wearing non-medical face masks or coverings on transit.

7. Conclusion

Since the beginning of March 2020, numerous health and safety measures have been put into place to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19, keeping travellers, staff and contractor employees as safe as possible.

Starting July 2, 2020, YRT, together with the GTHA transit agencies, will resume front-door boarding for travellers and normal fare collection. Health and safety measures identified in this report will continue until such time the Region's Medical Officer of Health determines they are no longer required.

As increased ridership and front door boarding decreases the ability to guarantee physical distancing on conventional and Viva transit buses, it will now be mandatory for travellers on YRT to wear non-medical face masks or coverings. Face masks and coverings are identified by public health as being an effective means of reducing the spread of COVID-19 where physical distancing is not possible.

It is recommended the Transit Bylaw be amended to include a provision requiring all individuals to wear a non-medical face mask or covering while on a transit vehicle and that this requirement be extended to all transit properties. Traveller compliance will be encouraged through education and public awareness.

Staff will continue to monitor updates to public health recommendations and provincial guidelines to ensure the YRT system is adequately prepared to help reduce the spread of COVID-19 as the Province of Ontario reopens.

For more information on this report, please contact Ann-Marie Carroll at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 75677. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.

Recommended by: **Paul Jankowski**
Commissioner of Transportation Services

Approved for Submission: **Bruce Macgregor**
Chief Administrative Officer

June 22, 2020
Attachments (2)
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